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FROM TIGER TO HOUSE CAT: THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVITY IN BELGIAN CATHOLIC EDUCATION (1930–1980)

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ABSTRACT The concept of creativity is hugely popular in education, but the way it is used to defend dissimilar and sometimes even opposing paradigms baffles observers. The author argues that the use of the concept of creativity within education cannot be understood without taking into account its historical construction. From the moment of its introduction, educators appropriated and adapted the concept of creativity to fit their particular needs, traditions and practices. The article will show how the use of creativity as a rhetorical tool was made possible by the strong link between creativity, mental health and social harmony which has been a stereotype in the creativity literature since the 1950s. To demonstrate these points, the author will explore Belgian catholic education between 1930 and 1980.

Keywords: creativity; education; conceptual history; Catholicism

Frontispice of the 1981 booklet *Op weg naar een muzische school*, edited by the Flemish Catholic Teacher's Union (COV) to promote creativity and a feeling for beauty in schools.

1. Introduction

In the 1968 curriculum for Flemish Catholic schools (Nationaal Verbond voor Katholiek Onderwijs, 1967), creativity was prized as the most essential quality for a teacher. At the same time, however, the curriculum seemed to downplay the importance of fantasy and imagination. In a paragraph on children's essays, for example, the authors stressed that children should draw their inspiration mainly from their direct surroundings; fantasy essays were put down at the bottom of the priority list. In another paragraph, from the biology curriculum, children's fascination for exotic animals and plants was presented as a problem. "Native and even local animals should be the priority in biology," the text stated, "because only direct experience is a guarantee for learning." Luckily, the adroit educator could benefit from the child's exotic interests: "the teacher can use the pupil's fascination for the tiger to arouse his interest in the house cat."

Rather than being an exception, examples like these are omnipresent in the Belgian catholic school system. We are confronted here with a seeming contradiction: an educational system in which creativity is highly valued, but in which the imagination and fantasy are seen as relatively unimportant, or even unwanted. In one way or another, catholic Belgian educators seemed to have developed an interpretation of creativity devoid of those elements.

In an article with the ominous title "Creativity in the Classroom: The Dark Side," David H. Cropley (2008, pp. 297–308) pointed to teacher's "misconceptions" of the term creativity. There were discrepancies, he stated, between the everyday idea of the term and "the more closely defined understanding in technical discussions." Quoting the research of Westby and Dawson (1995), he observed that even teachers who were theoretically convinced of the need for creativity tended to dislike creative pupils in their classroom. Moreover, teacher's implicit conceptions about creativity included the notions of responsibility, reliability and, "almost bizarrely," conformity. For Cropley, the conclusion was clear: creativity researchers needed to work harder to communicate a "sufficiently tightly integrated yet highly differentiated definition of creativity."

For a historian, it is hard to accept Cropley's implicit assumption that the psychologist's way to think about creativity is the only correct way. Nevertheless, his claim that teachers have a distinct way of thinking about creativity is intriguing; we will use it as the starting point for this article, without, however, making the distinction between "right" and "wrong" interpretations of creativity (a theoretical choice which will be defended in detail below). Rather, my aim will be to show how the construction of creativity within education was the result of a certain historical constellation, of a combination of factors both internal and external to education.

It is my belief that a historical insight into the history of the emergence of the concept might bring a better understanding of it current use.

Although there are differences between different school systems and different regions, the emergence of the concept of creativity in the 1950s was a pre-eminently international phenomenon, spurred by Anglosaxon research. Thomas Popkewitz has coined the term "indigenous foreigner" to denote the fact that certain ideas were able to integrate dissimilar educational paradigms by being presented, in each new situation, as ahistorical and "natural" to the situation (Popkewitz, 2005). Something similar goes for the concept of creativity. Ideally, a study of creativity should encompass the reception and "appropriation" (Depaepe, 2012) of the concept in different contexts and regions. In this article, however, we will limit myself to a small, but illuminating example: catholic education in Belgian catholic schools between roughly 1930 and 1980. As we will see, the processes at play were by no means exclusive to our example.

The article starts with a discussion of the methodology, followed by a short introductory chapter that provides the necessary contextual information. Afterwards, it explores the interpretation of creativity during three distinct timeframes: from 1930 to 1950, in a period when the concept of creativity was not yet in use; in the 1950s, the period during which the concept emerged in Belgian education; and from the 1960s to 1980, when the concept became increasingly well-known. In the conclusion, we will discuss the ambiguous relationship between scientific research on creativity and the use of the concept by educators.

2. Methodology

Like the other authors in this edition, we consider the concept of creativity a social construction without fixed meaning. Even within psychological research, this line of thinking seems to gain ground. Czsikszentmihalyi (1996, p. 23) stated that "creativity does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a socio-cultural context". Likewise, Preiser (2006, p. 174) has noted that the object of creativity research is still regarded as indistinct from a scientific standpoint; he comes to the conclusion that creativity is a social construction and not an operationalizable scientific construct. As a historian, however, my main reference point is the historian and philosopher Quentin Skinner (2002), who argued that the history of a concept cannot be seen apart from its use in argumentation. In his texts, he stresses that value-laden concepts such as freedom or democracy are no mere descriptive terms, but rhetorical tools which are used in political and social discussions. Hence, a concept has no fixed meaning, independent of its social context and its use in discourse.

Skinner stresses that the historian should not focus on the ideas itself, but on the different ways in which a concept can be put to work: in describing the history of a concept, he states, one must take into account the way it was formed by the particular set of questions which gave rise to it. Consequently, the aim of this article is to study the historical evolution of the *use* of the concept of creativity in educational discourse, apart from considerations about what creativity is or should be. In the vein of Skinner's work, we assume that to understand the form that creativity has taken in education, one has to look at the way it was used in argument.

When creativity entered educational language in the late 1950s and 1960s, it got integrated within an already-existing discourse on children's creative capacities, imagination and spontaneity. The chosen timeframe is thus broad enough to include both the period just before the emergence of the concept and the period of its increasing popularization. At the same time, it is limited to a few decennia, in the line of Skinner's (2002) position that it is more useful to study the discourse of a closely defined period than to study the evolution of concepts over a long time frame. The source material consists of catholic educational journals and booklets. The most consulted archives were the Documentation and Research centre for Religion, Culture and Society (KADOC) in Leuven, the archive of the Christian teacher's union COV in Brussels and the AMVB, the archive for Flemish cultural life in Brussels. Among the journals, *Christene School* and *Pedagogische Periodiek* proved to be the most relevant for this article. The research aims to study the use of creativity in argument – therefore, we searched for educational texts that dealt explicitly with creativity. Before the 1950s, however, the term creativity wasn't yet in use, which means that we had to look for terms that are closely related: the "creative imagination", "creative capacities" or "creative power" – or their Dutch and French equivalents. As the article will try to show, however, these terms did not carry exactly the same set of meanings as the term creativity.

3. Belgian Catholic Education

De Coster, Depaepe, Simon & Van Gorp (2005) argue that Belgium forms an interesting case for the study of the reception of educational ideas. As a small, but centrally situated country, Belgium is at the crossroads of different cultures and influences. Within its borders, a French-speaking and a Dutch-speaking community live side by side: the region of Flanders in the north is Dutch-speaking, while the French-speaking community lives in Wallonia, the southern part (for the purpose of this research, the very small German-speaking community is left aside). To add to the linguistic complexity, French was the *lingua franca* among the Flemish and Walloon

upper middle class from the early 19th century until well into the 20th century. Moreover, the capital of Brussels, which is geographically situated within Flanders, is predominantly francophone since the late 19th century. Ideologically, Flanders was mostly catholic and conservative, with the exception of some of its major cities. Wallonia, on the other hand, was strongly influenced by socialism. The capital of Brussels was a stronghold of secular liberalism. Before the Second World War, the French-speaking community fell into the cultural influence sphere of France, whereas the Dutch-speaking community was more oriented towards Germany. After the war, like elsewhere in Europe, the Anglophone world became the main cultural reference point – more so, however, in the region of Flanders, where there was a real shift in influence sphere (Witte & Van Velthoven, 2000). Within Flanders, the catholic worldview was dominant until the 1960s. Although there was a well-developed official school network in larger cities like Antwerp and Ghent, in smaller cities, and certainly in the countryside, catholic schools grouped a large majority of the pupils (Grootaers, 1998). After the 1960s, the influence of religion began to wane, although the number of catholic schools remained nearly as high as before (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2012). In Wallonia, Catholics schools were a minority: as a result, the amount of sources on catholic education is much more limited. Moreover, creativity was seldom addressed in those texts – maybe because the Anglophone influence was less pronounced. Therefore, the article deals mainly with Flemish education, although the existing sources show that the interpretation of creativity within francophone catholic education proceeded along the same lines.

4. The Interwar Period: Catholic Action and the 1936 Curriculum

The increasing political polarization in interwar Europe placed children and youngsters in the centre of attention. In response to the increasing mobilization on the right and the left, the Catholic Church began an organized international campaign to win as many souls as possible for its doctrine (see e.g. Coudenys, 1998 for Belgium; Gellott, 1988 for Austria; De Haan, 1994 for the Netherlands; Poggi, 1967 for Italy). The "Catholic Action", as it was called, can be considered a part of the increasing process of massification that had been in progress since the end of the 19th century (Depaepe, 2012). At the same time, it was an attack on those aspects of modernization that were considered threatening by the Church. Urbanization, industrialization and increasing social mobility caused ruptures in the rural communities and local traditions that had been a cornerstone of catholic faith. The rapid disintegration of traditional ways of life – described as a "traumatic event" by Beyen (2001) – was exacerbated by the economic crises of the

1930s, which lead to the increasing attractiveness of movements that promised a sense of belonging (Reynebau, 1994). Just like the radical left- and right-wing organizations that sprouted during those years, catholic educators spoke about their efforts in terms of "mobilization," "armies" and "offensive." The ultimate goal was the defense of certain "moral values" that were deemed to be threatened: respect for family, authority, tradition, and religion – the last factor being the ultimate touchstone for the others. Respect for these values was to be obtained through an authoritarian education based on obedience and willpower (Depaepe, 1997a).

It is in this context that the 1936 Belgian curriculum reform for elementary education was introduced. Written together by Catholics and secularists, the new curriculum promised a form of instruction that would be no longer based on the traditional subject classification. Instead, the lessons would be systematically concentrated around what were called "centers of interest," a complex of subject matters closely related to the environment of the child. The notion of centers of interest was derived from the works of liberal educational reformer Ovide Decroly. On the whole, the reform concretized the ideas of the proponents of New Education: it propagated a shift from passive education to an active school, embraced child psychology and opened the way for pedagogical experiments. The curriculum was internationally lauded by school reformers. In practice, however, its implementation was obstructed by the central institutions of the catholic elementary schools, who objected to what they saw as a materialistic view on the world, which ignored the religious life of the child (Depaepe, Devroede & Simon, 1991).

Catholics did not share the enthusiasm of reformers like Decroly for the natural sciences and modern systems of measurement. They kept a distance from what they called "American" quantitative methods like IQ testing and adhered more closely to German educational discourse, which has been described by Tröhler (2003) as a dualistic mode of thinking that preferred unity above plurality, inwardness above outwardness and *Geist* (soul, feeling) above empiry. As a result of this antinaturalism, Catholics replaced the "centers of interest" of the 1936 curriculum by *heemkunde*, an educational concept derived from German *Heimatkunde* (see Horn & Link 2011). Just like the centers of interest, *heemkunde* prescribed the concentration of the curriculum around the interest sphere of the child and promoted an active and individualizing form of learning. At the same time, however, it emphasized religious traditions, communal feasts and local folklore. In this way, the defenders of *heemkunde* aimed to promote religious and nationalist sentiments and to fend off unwanted social changes like urbanization, migration and industrialization (Fannes, 2013).

5. The Imagination, Self-expression and Spontaneity

Although the term creativity was not yet in use, concepts like the imagination, self-expression and spontaneity were regularly discussed in educational texts. Traditionally, Catholics regarded the imagination with suspicion. It had "an enormous influence on our character," conceded psychology professor Albert Kriekemans in an educational booklet on the subject, but "let's not forget that the lowest in us, too, exerts its influence *there*." Although Kriekemans had the intention to *promote* the use of the imagination in education, he stressed the importance of "rational laws" and "willpower" and the necessity of keeping the imaginative life "within organic boundaries." This attitude towards the imagination persisted until the 1950s. The imagination was useful if, and only if, it was in accordance with the moral and religious norms of society – but it was a dangerous capacity which should be tightly controlled and "purified" by the teacher (Decoene, 1953, p. 190).

In contrast to the imagination, the concept of *spontaneity* had equivocally positive connotations. However, it was understood in a very specific manner. Spontaneity was associated with an absence of artificiality and artfulness, but also with an attachment to family values, local (natural) surroundings and to the nation. An author who attached great importance to the notion of spontaneity was school inspector Felix Heidendal (1904–1999), who became one of the first promoters of creativity in Belgian education in the late 1950s. In 1941, he wrote that the *volksziel* (a word similar to the German *Volksgeist*, but meaning, in this context, man in the street or even villager, as opposed to city dweller), should remain "true to himself" – otherwise, the "creative cultural powers" would not be able to develop (p. 68). This form of authenticity entailed an absence of socially unacceptable ambitions: the purpose of life was the development, not only of one's personality, but also of an inner happiness with one's own, God-given place in society (Depaepe, 2006).[1] Connected to this was the idea that artistic expression should be a direct reflection of the inner life. "Simplicity and naturalness, the way things are," exhorted Heidendal in a text on children's essays (1948b, p. 52); another catholic author, Alberic Decoene, spoke of the "childlike naivety" necessary to progress in aesthetic matters – the absence of which resulted in "shrill music, depressing buildings and restless paintings" (Decoene, 1953, p. 64).

Within New Education, self-expression was a key notion since the early 1920s: the New Education Fellowship, for example, organized conferences around themes such as "The Creative Self-Expression of the Child" (1921), "Education for Creative Service" (1923) and "The Development of Creative Powers in the Child" (1925) (Fuchs, 2004; Brehony, 2006). In catholic

educational discourse, the term began to make headway after the new curriculum of 1936, but not nearly to the same extent. Even if an educator like Felix Heidendal insisted that the educator should find his inspiration "in the spontaneous expressions of the folk soul" (1939, pp. 25–26), this exhortation was accompanied by the warning that there were forms of expression that were "buried *too* low:" "the underworld of witches, phantoms, quacks and so on". Just like the imagination, then, expression was supposed to serve a higher aim, and not seen as an end goal in itself.

In general, expression and emotion were only encouraged in a highly encoded and ritualized way. In catholic texts from the 1930s, detailed instructions on how to express "appropriate" emotional expressions were not uncommon – e.g. that a girl's facial expression should be "gracious" in all circumstances, but "happy for those in joy, dejected for those in sorrow" (Stijns, 1934). The expression of intimate aspects of pupil's private life, however, was discouraged. Until well into the 1960s, teachers were explicitly urged to avoid overly intimate details in classroom conversation. Children's tendency to let "out familial issues" should be "blocked off", a 1963 text stated: in this manner, children would learn to know "about what they can talk and about what they should remain silent" (Stoffelen and Nauwelaerts, 1963, p. 64).

Not surprisingly, our catholic sources give almost no details on children's intimate and emotional life. This is not the case for schools inspired by New Education. A comparison seems needed here to show the difference in emotional regime. The following text was written in 1934 by a twelve-year old pupil at "l'école de Paudure," a small school in a farmer's village in Wallonia. At the time, it was the only school in Belgium that followed the Freinet principles and one of the few "alternative" schools in Belgium.[2] The quote gives a vivid description of the festivities at New Year's Eve and starts when "Uncle Louis" enters the door, shouting:

> I see you've already brought drinks. That's the most important thing for me, he says, the cake is for the others. [...] Godmother fills the glasses and gives cake to everybody. She insists that there be singing. It's godfather who starts. By the third song, Uncle Louis is getting a bit tipsy. He keeps on saying: "fill the glasses, it's me who pays", but it's the bottle of godmother that's getting empty. After a while, he begins to play the harmonica on his hands. Joseph plays the piano on the table […] We continue playing music and just when we are thinking of going home, Lo begins dancing with his wife. (Balesse, 1980, p. 72)

In texts like these, one encounters a universe of tactile sensations and non-moralistic joyfulness that was quite alien to catholic education.

6. The 1950s: Towards an Acceptance of the Ever-changing World

All in all, the catholic educational project during the interwar period was self-consciously conservative. After the war, it became increasingly difficult to maintain this anti-modernist stance, although the change in discourse took more than a decade. During the years from 1945 to 1957, "the battle against personal sin" was continued in Catholic publications, often accompanied by a harsh criticism of the influence of mass media, mass consumption and mass leisure. Increasingly, however, the virulent tone of catholic publications gave way to a grudging acceptance of social change. New social or cultural trends, it was said, obliged staff and core members to adopt a more moderate stance toward society (Laermans, 1995, p. 72). In the educational texts, one can note a gradual evolution from a litany of complaints about "negro music," mixed marriages, the movies, "comics books," city life in general (e.g. Heidendal & Breckx, 1948; Sintubin, 1950; Burm, 1952; Decoene, 1953; Kerstens, 1958; Depauw 1958) to a more subdued discourse on the distress of modern man, the ever-changing world, and, connected to this all, the need for creativity (e.g. Heidendal, 1956; Edelgardis, 1957).

It is in this context that Felix Heidendal published an educational booklet on "Creativity and expression in education and school" (1959) – the first of its kind in Belgium. The notion of an ever-changing world was by then firmly established, and the concept of creativity began to appear occasionally in the discourse of youth organizations and educational authors. We will analyze this booklet in detail because exemplifies the ambiguous relationship of catholic educators towards the new concept.

Heidendal's interest for creativity seems to have been stimulated by the hugely popular 1958 world exhibition in Brussels and more specifically by the children's pavilion within the American pavilion. Designed by Victor D'Amico, this was a place where children would be left on their own to explore their imaginations: no adults were allowed, except the supervisors of the pavilion (Ogata, 2013; Haddow, 1997). His text referred to proponents of New Education and champions of the "romantic" view on child art: Wilhelm Viola, Marion Richardson and Marjorie Hourd and the art educator Viktor Lowenfeld. The many references to Dutch psychologists and educators (Wilhelmina Bladergroen, Géza Révész, Heeg Nieuwenhuis, H.E. Van Gelder and Pancratius Post) showed that the subject of creativity had already been explored more thoroughly in the Netherlands (Rheeden, 1989). Nowhere, however, did Heidendal mention Anglophone creativity researchers. It seems that he began to use the concept of creativity without any knowledge about the origin of the term in Anglophone psychological research. This might be the reason why he did not classify creativity as a separate characteristic, but described it as "formal expression," the more

deliberate and less personal counterpart of "self-expression" (later on, when he got acquainted with Anglophone creativity research in the 1960s, he changed the hierarchical order: creativity became the all-encompassing term, with expression as a subdivision).

Heidendal presented expression and creativity as an absolute necessity in education. Modern society, he stated, had caused an impoverishment of the opportunities for spontaneous expression: "In older days, the organization of the familial environment offered many opportunities for creative expression. [...] think of the participation in familial and folkloric feasts with their mysterious background [...]. Due to changing living conditions, this has disappeared" (1956, p. 10). Similarly, "the machine" caused a decline in the opportunities for expression within the work sphere (1959, p. 3). The school had to compensate for this decline in occasions for expression, Heidendal stated, because modern psychology had shown that when opportunities for expression were denied, neuroses and mental problems would result.

First voiced in the psychoanalytical texts of Freud, Jung and Adler, the idea of creative activity as an emotional outlet was popularized in educational circles through the works of authors like George Herbert Read and Viktor Lowenfeld (Efland, 1990). In *Creative and Mental Growth*, Lowenfeld stated that the frustrated child would develop inhibitions and grow into a tense and restricted personality (1947, p. 7). Read went even further in his book *Education through Art*: in the midst of the Second World War, he claimed that "the gigantic catastrophes that threaten us are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological kind, but [...] psychic events." "The secret of all our collective ills," he stated, "is to be traced to the suppression of spontaneous, creative ability in the individual" (1943, pp. 201–202). Following Lowenfeld and Read, catholic authors saw expression and creativity as "the way to save the disjointed personality of today's man;" like them, too, they claimed that education had to aim at "the liberation of the personality and the destruction of everything that is stereotypical in thought and feeling" (Heidendal, 1959).

Although Heidendal criticized the lack of real expression in the schools of his day, his examples show that he remained indebted to the traditional teaching methods he had grown up with. In one example (1956, pp. 15–16), Heidendal described how a young pupil in nursery school began to work on a painting, first drawing the house and its interior, then, to the right of it, a big human figure. To the other side she painted a smaller figure with a stick in the hand. Everything was brushed in a "dull grey color" with "short, angular lines." The teacher passed by and asked for the identity of the figures:

-This must be mother, with her long hairs?
The girl nods.
-And this must be father, I guess?
-No, is the resolute answer. It's the policeman.

The nursery teacher hesitated, since she knew the family and its tragedy. Father drank and occasionally beat mother and child; when that happened, the police had to restore order. In Heidendal's words, the teacher "understands and doesn't insist any further, but taps the child reassuringly on the shoulder." On the one hand, the fragment exemplifies the idea of creativity as an emotional outlet; on the other hand, the teacher's silence shows the ambiguous status of artistic expression in catholic classrooms: it provided the teacher with an indirect way of assessing the child's emotional life which avoided the need for a direct discussion.

In another fragment, Heidendal described how children without opportunities for expression misbehaved themselves after school – "they scream, run around, curse, fight, tease and draw on walls and fences (and what sort of drawings?)" – and contrasted this with the same pupil's behavior when there is "a fanfare band in the village", next to which they can "frisk about, dance and jump" (1959, p. 17). It is then, Heidendal stated, that "they can express their feelings in an unrestrained way." He thus classified uncontrollable forms of expression as negative and forced, and controlled expression (dancing to the beat) as positive and unrestrained.

In another example of creative activity in the classroom, Heidendal presented the collective composition of a poem after the observation of a wreath of hazelnut twigs (1959, pp. 62–63). With the help of the teacher, the children looked for a poetic expression of their emotions:

-White as …? -Milk? -No! -As… snow? -No. Not snow! -White as… cotton wool! That's it. And we repeat together.
-Soft as… silk. -That goes easier, already.
-Tender as… a child.
-And what does the child do?
-It sleeps… in its crib.
Afterwards, the whole is practiced by the class. [...] A poem is born.

Again, the focus is on order and guidance from the teacher. Moreover, the criteria for the evaluation of the poem seem to have been based, not so much on originality, but on the expression of positive feelings: tenderness, warmth, naturalness.

As the examples show, the use of the concept of creativity was regulated by a set of associations and oppositions. The terms creative / happy / controlled / constructive / nature were mutually linked and opposed to the terms uncreative / unhappy / out of control / destructive / city life. It is clear

that, in some regards at least, this interpretation of creativity differed significantly from American creativity research. While the creativity movement in America was, to a large extent, focused on technology and the arms race with Soviet Russia (Eisner, 2002), Belgian educators used the concept of creativity mostly in opposition to modern technology. Although they got gradually acquainted with creativity research during the 1960s – mainly through work of academic lecturers like Cyriel De Keyser and Alfred De Block, who translated the most important findings into Dutch (De Keyser, 1978; De Block, 1972) – their interpretation of the concept did not fundamentally change until the late 1980s.

7. The 1960s and 1970s: Creativity as a Revelation

During the 1960s, the concept of creativity became remarkably popular within Christian circles – not only in schools, but also in Christian youth movements and priests' seminars (which fall outside the scope of this article, but see Coussée, 2006). Catholics spoke of creativity in religious terms as a "revelation" or "our only hope of salvation" (Stichting Lodewijk de Raet, 1968); Heidendal, in one of his later texts, described it as "the pure water that can be found up in the mountains, at the source of brooks and rivers" (1973, p. 40). This enthusiasm for creativity was partially the result of the Second Vatican Council and the search of many Catholics for a more individualized form of spirituality (see, e.g. Greeley, 2004; Mellink, 2014). On the other hand, it was also a reflection of the superlatives in which creativity researchers of the epoch described their subject.

Recent overviews of creativity research tend to lay the emphasis on quantitative research; the humanistic approach gets comparatively less attention (for example, the 1999 *Handbook of Creativity* gives 38 quotations for Guilford, 32 for Torrance, 5 for Rogers and 4 for Maslow). While this undoubtedly reflects the current research agenda, it gives a wrong impression of the reception history of creativity research. In educational circles, the "third force" approach to creativity, as exemplified by Maslow and Rogers, was decidedly more popular.[3] Although both Maslow and Rogers were avowed atheists, their works were considered good reading for Catholics, even in priest's seminars; Rogers himself was the subject of admiration, described as a "modern Don Bosco" by an author in catholic magazine *Pedagogische Periodiek* (Van Diest, 1974, p. 144). Unlike either Freudianism or behaviorism, humanistic psychology was flexible enough to allow a religious interpretation. Maslow's hierarchy of values got integrated within the hierarchical Catholic worldview (with religious experience at the top of the pyramid), and Maslow's and Roger's assumption that the human personality is, at its core, constantly striving for the good, accorded well with

the spirit of optimism that pervaded the church after the second Vatican council. Moreover, they both expressed a preference for internal feeling above external evaluation (Rogers (1976) stated that "the most fundamental condition of creativity is that the source or locus of evaluative judgment is internal"), which was in line with the traditional catholic preference for unity above plurality, inwardness above outwardness and feeling above empiry (Tröhler, 2003).

In an article on the reception of Roger's therapeutic approach within the German Catholic church, Ziemann (2006, p. 90) noted that Catholics ascribed a high degree of implicit Christianity to the principles postulated by Rogers: authenticity, empathy, esteem for the other. The reception of Rogers' approach, he writes, can be described through the paradigm of "Fremdprophetie": the Church reacted to Roger's approach as if it was reminded of its own virtues from the outside – as if it brought to light central but forgotten components of its own tradition. This was coupled with a highly selective reading of the texts: although Rogers was esteemed for his insistence on children's spontaneity, his pleas for anti-authoritarian schooling were largely ignored.

8. Creativity, Mental Health and Social Harmony

The most lasting influence of creativity research on educational discourse was the association between creativity, mental health and social harmony. This association was not invented by creativity researchers, but did receive a scientific aura through their work. In contrast to earlier approaches that linked creative activity and genius with neurosis and mental imbalance (Galton, 1869), creativity researchers of the 1950s and 1960s tended to interpret creativity as a sign of mental balance. According to Frank Barron, one of the pioneers of creativity research, the creative person was "more primitive and more cultured, more destructive and more constructive, occasionally crazier yet adamantly saner, than the average person" (Barron, 1963, quoted in Kaufman & Sternberg, 1999). Again, the most outspoken claims about the relationship between creativity, mental health and social harmony came from humanistic psychology. Maslow hypothesized a qualitative difference between "happy" and "unhappy" creativity and claimed that he could "by inspection alone" distinguish between the creative products of satisfied and unsatisfied people and. He claimed that the fullest and "healthiest" creativity could only be expected when the basic needs of people were met (Maslow, 1943).

The connection between creativity, mental health and social harmony became one of the most prominent features of the educational discourse on creativity. In blurring the lines between the personal and the political, it

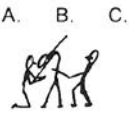
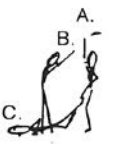
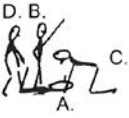
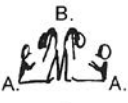
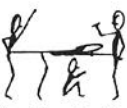
turned the concept of creativity into a powerful rhetorical tool: what creativity *meant* became dependent on the social ills that were diagnosed by the author in question. Many American intellectuals saw conformity as one of the biggest social threats in postwar society – likewise, their conceptualization of creativity entailed anti-conformism and autonomy (Cohen-Cole, 2009); an author like Lowenfeld (1947), who saw the loss of sensory experience and self-reliance as the main problem in modern society, placed high value on the depiction of sensory impressions (e.g. drawing the experience of walking on wet grass with naked feet) but had little interest for fantasy drawings; Belgian Catholic educators, basing their diagnosis of social ills on the negative effects of modernization and the disappearance of community life, emphasized communal aspects, naturalness and the happiness that was supposed to result from creativity. Moreover, since theoretical reflection on the evaluation of creative products was scarce (De Keyser, 1978; Haller, Courvoisier & Cropley, 2011), any element could serve as a criterion for judging creative products. This means that some educators interpreted creativity as a process that would lead to *joyful* and *orderly* results. In line with this insistence on order, catholic educators stressed the element of responsibility in their definition of creativity. It is telling, in this regard, that the educational journal *Pedagogische Periodiek* systematically translated the terms "new and appropriate" as "*nieuw en verantwoord*" which means "new and responsible" in Dutch. The terms new and appropriate, commonly used in definitions of creativity, stress the fact that the original outcomes of a thought process should bear relevance on the problem at hand, before they can be considered creative (Lubart, 2010; Landers, 2010 provides an overview of the different variations on this definition.) To translate appropriate as "v*erantwoord*" indicates a shift in focus, from the concrete task at hand to the well-being of the social group, in this case the classroom. In this way, creativity could become a rhetorical tool for even the most traditional educators, who could claim that "creativity is above all religious" and not "the constant search for novelty" – and that contestation and disregard for authority were a direct threat to creativity, because "flowers do not bloom in dodgy weather" (Claassen, 1973).

The introduction of the concept of creativity did not bring about a fundamental change in the interpretation of concepts like the imagination, spontaneity and self-expression. The term creativity seemed to offer scientific proof that there was a difference between good and bad imagination, and that the one could be stimulated without stimulating the other. In consequence, some educational texts stressed the importance of creativity but downplayed fantasy, as in the example of the house cat and the tiger with which we opened the article.

Until well into the 1980s, Catholics associated creativity with a resistance against the dehumanizing aspects of modernization (Stichting Lodewijk de Raet, 1968). In a 1979 book called "creativity at school" – the report of a week-long conference on the subject – school inspectors Moors and Schlusmans complained that modern society had made men into "the most useful automaton" (*Creativiteit op School*, 1979, p. 26) and that children "have lost their naïve kindness" (p. 33). In order to stimulate their creativity, one should teach them to become "*nein-sagers*," literally "nay-sayers," who would be able to resist temptations like "status-seeking," "non-conventional and alternative behavior" or "the fatal fashion of travelling." In a 1981 booklet on creativity and artistic formation, it was claimed that creativity and a "*muzische*" lifestyle would be "the healing force for the many illnesses of our world:" the disappearance of "childlike naivety," the "break of unity between life and thinking," the "withering of respect for man and life" and "the diminishing belief in God" (*Op weg naar een muzische school*, p. 30).

The relationship of creativity to change thus remained thoroughly ambiguous. Although social change was usually portrayed as inevitable, it was certainly not always welcomed. Educators used the concept of creativity not so much to draw a distinction between inertia and change as to draw a distinction between different *types* of change. While the changes associated with creativity were presented as personal, harmonious and natural, unwanted social changes were described as cold or threatening. These threats could be directed towards certain values, but also towards creativity itself.[4] Interestingly enough, the anxiety in the educational texts was always the anxiety of an adult. Not once in the sources do we find the suggestion that children themselves were afraid of rapid change. On the contrary, many texts seemed to suggest that children were a little *too* susceptible to the new; that youngsters seemed to overvalue anything which only *resembled* creativity – which, in turn, threatened their *real* creativity. In this way, the concept of creativity was used to transform adult's anxiety about *social* change into a concern for the *personal* mental capacities of children. Such a conceptualization of creativity entailed that the child be shielded off from negative social influences: it created a distinction between experiences which would promote, and experiences which would stifle his creativity. Thus transformed into a source of anxiety, rather than an instigator for reform, the concept of creativity, despite its apparent openness to change, might well have encouraged the continuation of a grammar of schooling (Depaepe et al., 2000).

De mechanisatie

Groep	*Oefeningen*	*Schets*
IV	A: Knnstd., neemt Vtn. vst. van B / An. bg. en str.; B: Bklg., An. voorw. / An. spr. en sluit.;	
VII	A: Knnstd.; An. voorw. tot krg. gevormd; B: kl. sprst., An. voor en rugw. gestr. / Rp. voorw. bg. tot voorste A. in krg. A; C: kl. voorw. sprstd., An. voorw. / rugw. ng. tot rugw. uitvalstd.;	
II	A: std., met r. A; opw. gestr., met L. H. Vt. vst. van C; B: kl. sprstd. / An. af en opw. nr. l. en H. van A dr.; C: Bklg. met l. Kn. gebg. tot stn. van r. Kn.	
III	A: Rglg., Bn. opw. gestr.; B: std. acht. A, r. A. voor het Lich. dr.; C: Knnstd. met Hn. nst. Hfd. A; D: std. voor A, Vtn. vst. van A en deze alternatief laten scharen;	
VI	A: Knnstd. / An. voorw. altern. op en afw. beweg.; B: Knnstd. nst. A / telkens r. A. tss. An. van A.;	
I	A: sprzt. / Hn. altern. op en afw. beweg. (Elbgn. pl.) B: Rp. voorw. en afw. bg., An. gestr. voorw.;	
V	A: std., r. H. aan Vt. van B, l. H. op en afw.; B: waagstd. voor A; Hn. Hpn. C; C: std. voor B, l. A. op en afw., r. A. voorw. en terug.; D: kleermakerszit ond. B, dr. met de An.;	

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An image representing a creative exercise from the 1981 booklet *Op weg naar een muzische school* (pp. 95–96). The exercise is typical in its negative portrayal of modern society, its emphasis on collectivity and its strict choreography that leaves little room for improvisation. It was connected to

a lesson of wereldoriëntatie ("world orientation")[5] with the title "from sheep wool to garment" and represented the different stages of the textile process: shaving, spinning, weaving... In the first half of the exercise, children represented artisanal labor and were all dressed in different colors. The second half showed the breakthrough modernization. The children were now dressed in black and formed part of "a big, black, fast-working machine", working in a "nervous and deafening rhythm" – "all too often the characteristic of our time…" (pp. 95–96).

9. Conclusion

The reception history of the concept of creativity within Belgian catholic education cannot be understood without consideration of the specific moment and context of its introduction. The concept of creativity entered an educational system in which the imagination was seen with suspicion and in which emotions, expression and even spontaneity were highly controlled. It found a receptive audience among educators struggling with both the effects of modernization and the experience of the Second World War, who saw in creativity a potential antidote to their anxieties and uncertainties. The concept of creativity could only fulfill this function through a process of adaptation, discoloring and simplification (De Coster, Depaepe, Simon, & Van Gorp, 2005). Because fear for modern mass society played such an important role for Catholics, it is mainly the humanistic approach to creativity research that caught their attention. The quantitative side of creativity research, which favored technological advance and entrepreneurship, was markedly less popular.

Educators tried to twist the concept in such a way as to include the techniques and practices they espoused and often already used in the classroom; the production of new and valuable results of imaginative thought, as the standard definition of creativity would have it, was not one of their priorities. Nevertheless, catholic educator's interpretation of creativity cannot be entirely attributed to "misconceptions" (Cropley, 2008). Most of the educators in this study had a fairly large theoretical background and were – to a certain extent – striving for a renewal in education. In fact, their interpretation of creativity was not as far removed from the psychological literature of the 1950s and 1960s as might be suspected.

Just like historians Jamie Cohen-Cole and Amy Ogata, we argue that the distinction between popular and scientific thinking on creativity was never that neat. The rhetorical structure of creativity, which stresses the connection between creativity, mental health and social harmony, was no invention of Belgian teachers. On the contrary, it featured very prominently in early (and more recent) creativity research. In a 2009 essay, Cohen-Cole

(2009) described the upsurge of interest for creativity in the VS as a response to the specific social circumstances of the postwar period. He claimed that psychologists constructed psychological theory directly on top of a foundation of popular wisdom about creativity and argues that psychologists' measures of creativity, autonomy and conformity aligned closely to the existing cultural and socioeconomic norms. In a similar vein, Amy Ogata (2013) has shown how from the 1930s on, marketers created an ideal of originality and productivity that was attractive, desirable and above all consumable by aligning the notions of creative imagination, mental health and social success – a combination of benefits that was integrated within the scientific literature on the subject. It is too easy, then, to just dismiss teacher's interpretation of creativity as the result of a mere misunderstanding of scientific research.

In interpreting these results, the reader should bear in mind the chronological and geographical limitations of the research. The sources were chosen from approximately 1930 to 1980. In the 1970s, a generation of Belgian educational authors arose that was less inclined to interpret creativity along the lines of traditional education. Some of these authors, like Ferre Laevers, have become influential academics within the educational field. In their writings, they promote an interpretation of creativity that emphasizes originality, self-reliance and entrepreneurship (1994). Although their first texts fall within the chosen timeframe, their influence on Belgian education became only palpable in the second half of the 1980s. We have thus chosen not to include these texts in our study. As stated in the introduction, the article aims to make certain arguments about the reception history of creativity through one specific case study. It is likely that similar evolutions have taken place elsewhere, but only further study on (both European and non-European) educational systems can enrich our understanding of the different ways in which creativity was interpreted.

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NOTES

1. This point of view was not exclusive to Belgian or to Catholic education: on the contrary, ideas like these can be traced back as far as Pestalozzi, who claimed that education should help people in finding their right place within diverse life circles: family, calling and locality (Tröhler, 2013).

2. We did not succeed in finding similarly frank source material in Dutch, not even in sources that were inspired by New Education, like the journal *Moderne School*, edited by school reformer Jozef Emiel Verheyen.

3. The research of, e.g., Guilford, Torrance, Mesnick and Barron did turn up in educational writings (especially Guilford's distinction between divergent and convergent thinking), but theoretical reflection on their works was rare. Writers like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, on the other hand, were eagerly read and discussed (e.g., Stichting Lodewijk De Raet, 1968; Jong, 1973; Heidendal, 1973; Creativiteit op school, 1980; De Graeve, 1980).

4. In fact, the claim that creativity is threatened in one way or another is so omnipresent in texts on creativity, that it could be argued that the history of the concept of creativity is primarily the history of its problematization

5. *Wereldoriëntatie* was the successor of the courses of *werkelijkheidsonderricht*, which, in turn, was the successor of *heemkunde* in prewar Flanders. In all three cases, it was a course dedicated to the study of geography and history seen through the lens of the daily life and direct surroundings of the child (Fannes, 2013).

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